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Life Sketches

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Paulo Braingers

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DAVID BRAINERD.

When God has work to be done, He sends the workman who can do it. On April 20th, 1718, there was born in the village of Haddam, Connecticut, a baby who was to become the second great missionary to the Indians. We know much of the life of David Brainerd as he left so complete a diary, telling of his daily life and of his work.

When David was nine years old his father died, and the death of his mother, five years later, left him an orphan. He worked on his farm and then went to live at the home of the minister at Haddam that he might study with him. From this home he entered Yale College, where he remained three years, leaving before he had been graduated because he refused to make a public apology for having said of one of the professors, "He has no more grace than this chair." In those days the students were not allowed to criticise their teachers, and so this remark of Brainerd's was thought to be a good cause for expulsion. This was a great blow to the young student, and his whole life was saddened by it, although he afterward went to Yale, met the professors, and became their warm friend.

After leaving college Brainerd studied with ministers until November, 1742, when, at the age of twenty-four, he was appointed a missionary to the Indians. He was expected to go to the Indians of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, but there being at that

time trouble between those Indians and the white people, Brainerd was sent for a time to the Indians near Stockbridge, Massachusetts. We will let his letters and his diary tell of his life there:

"The presence of God is what I want. I live in the most lonely, melancholy desert. I board with a poor Scotchman; his wife can scarce talk any English. My diet consists mostly of hasty pudding, boiled corn, and bread baked in the ashes, and sometimes a little meat and butter. My lodging is a heap of straw, laid upon some boards, a little way from the ground; for it is a log room, without any floor, that I lodge in. My work is exceedingly hard and difficult. I travel on foot a mile and a half, the worst of ways, almost daily, and back again, for I live so far from my Indians. . . . The Lord grant that I may learn to endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ! As to my *success* here, I cannot say much as yet. The Indians seem generally kind and well disposed toward me, are mostly very attentive to my instructions, and seem willing to be taught further.

"The Indians have no land to live on but what the Dutch people lay claim to, and these threaten to drive them off. They have no regard to the *souls* of the poor Indians, and by what I can learn they hate me because I come to preach to them.

"I have but one single person to converse with that can speak English."

This one person was a young Indian named John Wauwaumpequennaunt, who had been taught English in a minister's family, and who acted as Brainerd's interpreter.

The hardships and exposure which Brainerd endured brought on the illness from which

he suffered all through his short life as a missionary. In August he wrote:

"Spent most of the day in labor to procure something to keep my horse on in the winter. Was very weak in body through the day, and thought that this frail body would soon drop into the dust. In this weak state of body I was not a little distressed for want of suitable food. I had no bread, nor could I get any. I am forced to go or send ten or fifteen miles for all the bread I eat, and sometimes it is moldy and sour before I eat it, if I get any considerable quantity. And then again I have none for some days together, for want of an opportunity to send for it, and cannot find my horse in the woods to go myself."

November.—"Began to study the Indian tongue with Mr. Sergeant (the minister) at Stockbridge."

January 1st, 1744—"Of a truth God has provided for me bountifully, so that I have been enabled, in about fifteen months past, to bestow to charitable uses about an hundred pounds New England money (about $900). Blessed be the Lord, that has so far used me as his *steward*, to distribute a *portion of his goods.*"

After being about a year with these Indians, Brainerd wrote to a friend: "I informed them that I expected to leave them and to be sent to another tribe of Indians at a great distance. On hearing this they appeared very sorrowful, and some endeavored to persuade me to continue with them; urging that they had heard so much about their souls' concerns, that they could never more be willing to live as they had done. Whereupon I told them that they ought to be willing that others also should hear about their souls' concerns seeing that these needed it as

much as themselves. . . . I advised them in case I should be sent elsewhere to remove to Stockbridge, where they might be supplied with land and conveniences of living, and be under the ministry of Rev. Mr. Sergeant; with which advice and proposal they seemed disposed to comply."

In March, 1744, Brainerd went to Elizabethtown, N. J., and there the commissioners ordered him to go to the Indians of the Forks of the Delaware. This meant a long, tedious trip back to Massachusetts to settle his affairs there, and then another trip across to the Delaware River. We must remember that all these journeys were made on horseback, sometimes along paths or rough roads, but more often through the forests, where the traveler must guide his way by the sun, and, wrapped in his great coat, spend the night out-of-doors, whatever the weather.

Knowing of the ill health of this missionary we may be sure of his love for his work when we read that a number of churches having large and wealthy parishes, at this time, wished him to become their minister. The life would have been an easier one, but Brainerd never thought of that; his Indians were to be his care so long as strength for the work was given him.

Brainerd's own account of his meeting with the Delaware Indians is most interesting, but we must read but a few lines now. He wrote: " I first addressed their king in a friendly manner; and after some discourse, and attempts to contract a friendship with him, I told him I had a desire to instruct them in Christianity. At which he laughed, turned his back upon me and went away. I then addressed another principal man in the same manner, who said he was willing to

hear me. After some time I followed the king into his house, and renewed my discourse to him; but he declined talking and left the affair to another." Brainerd left these Indians, upon whom he could make no impression, and traveled on to others, of whom he writes: "Here, also, when I came to the Indians, I saluted their king and others. And soon after I informed the king of my desire to interest them in the Christian religion. After he had consulted a few minutes with two or three old men, he told me he was willing to hear. I then preached to those few who were present, and since that time the king has ever shown himself friendly to me, giving me free liberty to preach in his house whenever I think fit. Here, therefore, I have spent the greater part of the summer past, preaching usually in the king's house." Again he writes, "I perceived that some of them were afraid to hearken to and embrace Christianity, lest they should be enchanted and poisoned by some of the *powaws*. I told my people that I was a Christian, and asked them why the *powaws* did not bewitch and poison me."

In October Brainerd made a journey to the Susquehanna River, in order to visit the Indians who lived in that region. Of the trip he said in one of his letters: "We found the most difficult and dangerous traveling, by far, that any of us had ever seen. We had scarce anything else but lofty mountains, deep valleys, and hideous rocks, to make our way through. Near night, my beast on which I rode hung one of her legs in the rocks, and fell down under me; but through divine goodness I was not hurt. However, she broke her leg, and being in such a hideous place and near thirty miles from any house, I saw noth-

ing that could be done to preserve her life, and so was obliged to kill her, and to prosecute my journey on foot. This accident made me admire the divine goodness to me, that my bones were not broken, and the multitude of them filled with strong pain."

The following winter Brainerd spent with his Indians on the Delaware, and in making long, hard trips to New York, New England, and Philadelphia, trying to interest people to send more missionaries to the Indians. Then when spring came he went back to the Susquehanna to revisit the Indians he had seen before. He found few of those remaining there, and the others who were in their places were no more disposed than his Delaware people to accept Christianity. He wrote at this time: "Not having had any considerable appearance of special success in either of those places, my spirits were depressed, and I was not a little discouraged. Hearing that there were a number of Indians at a place called Crossweeksung, in New Jersey, I determined to make them a visit, and see what might be done toward Christianizing them."

These Indians were so interested and so anxious to learn that the services which Brainerd held for them were not enough to satisfy them, and they crowded his house by day and by night with eager questions. For two years the missionary remained among them, preaching to them, visiting in their wigwams, aiding them in their daily living, and being their friend and counsellor. But when success crowned all the efforts, and the church and school were established, Brainerd became so weak that he was obliged to leave his people, for a visit, they both hoped. He returned to New England to rest, but his strength was gone, and after reaching his

friends he failed rapidly, dying October 9th, 1747, at the age of twenty-nine years.

Though his life was short in years, and he was hampered by his illness, Brainerd had accomplished, by patience, perseverance, and an earnest desire to be of use, more than most people do in long lives. He opened the way for many missionaries who came after him, by proving that the work among the red men was necessary and possible, blessed of God, and rich in reward.

M. KATHARINE BENNETT.

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